

The Convocation Address
delivered by

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In the beginning was the Cod and the Cod was with the Maritimers but the Cod was for the West Indians.

In the beginning was the Cane and the Cane was with the West Indians, but its fermented juice was for the Maritimers. And since nothing so unites two peoples as a compatibility of their tastes, the relations between the people of the Maritimes and the people of the Carribean have been excellent for two centuries. Both peoples have shown a thirst after the righteousness and rum. Since the Fish was an ancient symbol of Christian integrity, one could say that the Maritimers in sending the Cod to the Carribean were contributing both to the virtue and the victuals of our people. West Indians still consume the salted Cod with a sense of relish and rectitude.

In return our rum contributed significantly to the political equipoise of Canada: for it helped to keep Canadian temperaments stable while Canadian temperatures violently fluctuated. Such was the hallowed priority that West Indians gave to their rum that up to at least 1815 Anglican rectors in the West Indies were paid their salaries in puncheons of that potent brew. - A privilege to which, I am reliably informed, the graduating class here tonight will at no time be privy.

This "spiritual" practice - paying rectors in rum - was the high water mark, - if I can use a diluting metaphor, - of Anglican complacency in the Carribean. Here was the church telling the world that whatever other economic problems it faced, the problem of liquidity was not of them. Fortunately that compacency has passed away. But what has not passed away is the special relationship between the West Indies and Canada, which has endured and matured to something like a fraternity of peoples. The honour, Mr. Chancellor, which you have conferred upon me tonight is an outward and visible sign of that old and honourable

connection. - A connection which began in a palatable reciprocity and has flowered into productive Cooperation in Development. It is equally fitting that the person who presented me for this honour should be Senator Henry Hicks, former Premier of Nova Scotia, latterly President of Dalhousie University, who was once a member of the Board of Govenors of the University of Guyana.

He is of Quaker lineage, which means that he can make much out of little. He is Methodist in his theology which means that he knows a great deal about the Doctrine of Election which he once combined with the more political knowledge of getting himself elected. But at heart he is really an Anglican, for his wit is in the tradition of the celebrated Sydney Smith, Canon of St. Paul's Cathedral, London in the 1820's and his wisdom is in the tradition of William Temple, the great Archbishop of Canterbury in the 1940's.

But I have an even more fundamental reason to be happy in becoming a graduate of Emmanuel and St. Chad. The reason is the spirit of Saskatchewan of which this theological college and this university are such admirable distillations.

Saskatchewan has made its own unique contribution to the West Indies in two ways: In wheat and in wisdom. For Carribean peoples do not live by the Cod alone but by bread and Indian roti too. And wherever in that region dough is being kneaded at this moment there is the produce of Saskatchewan in the hands of the kneader.

The wisdom you have shared with us is the wisdom of political imagination. Over thirty years ago, without the sounding of Joshua's trumpet or the unleashing of Jupiter's thunderbolts you staged your own Quiet Revolution. You in this province taught Canada and the West Indies

- who watched you with eager eyes - that the point of politics is not just power or patronage but solicitude - an informed solicitude which combines a passion for social justice inspired by the Gospels with a passion for practicality required by the robust realism of the Prairies.

You have reminded West Indians, and many others besides, that prophecy, if it is going to be penetrating, must be cognizant of the likes of potash; that a state of grace requires a sense of grain; and that a people freed from the fear of not meeting their medical bills is a people freed for the fulfillment of their artistic and intellectual drives.

Indeed, sir, I will go further and say that the people of this province have a positive gift for compassionate responsibility. My wife and I have just returned to Canada from Botswana, Swaziland and Lesotho. Wherever we went we met a number of Canadians contributing to the development of those countries and the natives of Saskatchewan were always half of them. Their expertise is creative and warm. Their commitment witty and unobtrusive, their living conditions absolutely basic and their joy in their work marvellously contagious. Such people are the pride of Canada and meeting them there in Africa has deepened my feeling of being at home in this Province - a feeling which the degree you have conferred upon me tonight so generously confirms.

Mr. Chancellor, our Lord and Master taught us that to be properly universal one must be affectionately local. Acting upon that principle, I am sure you will forgive me for alluding briefly to an event in Carribean history. This year marks the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire; which makes it a profoundly West Indian event since the vast majority of the slaves were concentrated

in that area.

1834 was a year of climax. It represented the culmination of a campaign waged for over 60 years by men and women, with a Christian imagination and secular skills, to end the denial of freedom to the black people of the region - a denial sanctioned by law, sustained by fear and founded on the proposition that not all peoples are created equal. Moses was the model, Pharaoh's Egypt was the ancient parallel and Exodus the inspiration for those men and women who actually achieved a revolution from above. Like the old biblical leader they kept turning to the British Parliament and saying "Let God's people go". Until it happened. And the black people of the West Indies became actors in human history instead of victims of it.

I call them people of a Christian imagination and I did that deliberately for, as convinced Christians they were not imprisoned in the prevailing fashions of their age. They did not see the future as merely an enlarged version of the present. They transcended their immediate context and that is the mark of people who live by their imagination. They could look back without being backward looking. They could draw strength from the past for bringing into existence their vision of the future. They saw themselves as God's agents helping to create - that is the operative word - create a society in which tiny elites did not hold large numbers of people in withering subjugation. In short their God was the Lord of history fashioning through his servants futures of enlarged opportunity for the maturing of human potential. And I would like you to note that they did not disdain temporary alliances with groups who desired the same end not from Christian conviction but from profitable convenience.

Their imagination gave them their vision, their faith gave them the strength to pursue it, their knowledge of public affairs gave them a talent for strategy, their understanding of the human mind sharpened their gifts for persuasion and their intimacy with the ebb and flow of day to day politics gave them their tactics.

Without vision the people perish - we all say that. But what we sometimes forget is that without effective strategies the finest policies perish and without adroit communication determination sickens. What our age can learn from the men and women who achieved the abolition of slavery 150 years ago amounts to three lessons: first, because they had a sense of history they understood the importance of sometimes using political means for achieving moral ends. Second, because they had a sense of theology they understood the importance of human dignity. Third, because they were people of imagination they could be concerned with the immediate without losing a sense of the ultimate. In short they taught us that in order to refashion our times we must move above our times and that is one of the marks of the Christian imagination.

As every artist knows: first comes the vision, then comes the essentially rigorous, sometimes tedious, certainly laborious task of giving the vision effective expressions. Vision without slog, whether artistic or political, to make it flesh and blood degenerates into pipe dreams. On the other hand bustling practicality without vision is artisanship without art. Gandhi, in one of his many humorous moments described the essence of the Christian vocation. He put it this way "I am that most dangerous of combinations: a practical visionary".

Mr. Chancellor, I hope you will allow me to cull one more example from history in my attempt to show the power of the imagination. Before

the great Age of Exploration in Europe - (roughly from the 14th to the 16th Centuries) - the age of Prince Henry the Navigator, of Vasco da Gama and Christopher Columbus, - geography was really theology expressed in maps. As a distinguished historian has recently put it: "What was known in geography was dogmatic and what was not dogmatic was unknowable". The limits of land and sea were believed to have been laid down in Holy Writ and there was just nothing new to discover beyond the sunset. People stayed locked up in the garrison confines of Europe, their coastal waters seeming to whisper "You shall go no further".

Then a profound quickening took place in the European imagination. Before the change came in the maps it came in the minds of certain people. They transcended the limitations set by ancient authorities; they transcended the restrictions of theological dogmas; they refused to obey the prescriptions against sailing into the unknown. They dismissed as nonsense the warning that those who sailed out into the western ocean would simply fall off the edge of a flat earth. The result? The continent which you and I now inhabit, the Pacific Ocean, the Indian Ocean, Antarctica, Australia all became known to Europeans. But that was because they were first discovered in the imagination and then discovered by men in ships.

When the voyageurs sailed forth in their fragile tiny vessels they took with them a little accurate map making, a large degree of faith and a powerful and encompassing imagination. They and their discoveries not only opened up the seas and linked old continents in new ways; they also opened up the minds of Europeans to the spaciousness of their planet and to the further discoveries yet to be made by the imagination. In short, the age of discovery represented an age of Liberation for Europeans who turned away from having a parochial - and quite mistaken concept - of the

size of our planet to a more truly global one. Unfortunately being the flawed sinners they were those explorers quickly turned the miracle of imagination into the crudity of conquest.

I have cited these two shifts of historical momentum because I believe they have fertile implications for our own perplexed era. We live in a world deeply in need of liberation - the liberation which the Christian imagination at its most vital can bring. On the one hand, we have billions of people in the Third World condemned to the slavery of the brute struggle for survival - their human dignity hourly humiliated by malnutrition, disease, oppression, lack of water and a lack of hope. Crushed by an international system which mistakenly assumes the comfort for the few must mean despair for the many; pillaged often by local elites, for whom development means only this "he that hath, to him shall it be given and he that hath not from him shall be taken away even the little that he hath"; their state of being seems a denial of the meaning of incarnation namely, that the dignity of man is part of the nature of God. Not to begin the task of liberating the deprived from their appalling conditions is to deny God's power in history and the power of our own imagination to bring about changes under God's dispensation.

On the other hand we have smaller sections of mankind living in suffocating surfeit, materially saturated to the point of boredom, racing frantically behind artificially created desires, inhabiting sloughs of opulent despond, in a state of spiritual malnutrition. Fearful of losing the very things which prevent them from satisfying their deepest longings, they often view any suggested change in the international ordering of our world which would diminish the gap between the haves and the have nots as a thrust at their jugular vein.

These people are also in need of liberation - liberation from their prisons of cluttered dissatisfaction.

Both forms of liberation, from the slavery of not having enough and from the slavery of having too much require fundamental changes in the way our world is ordered. Those changes in turn require profound changes in our vision of what the world can be - in short the triumph of the imagination over dogmatic denials that the world can be ordered and structured to give all its people a life of sufficiency. The map of change has first to be made in the human mind before it becomes a blueprint for our global community.

You, ladies and gentlemen of the graduating class, have an important role to play in engendering that shift of the human spirit. For the Word of which you will become ministers tells us that the God of power, who is the Lord of history, is also the God of creation, the Supreme Artist and that in Jesus Christ this combination of creativity and power were seen at their human perfection. Every great artist releases the imagination of those whom he or she confronts. And Jesus was constantly releasing peoples' minds from bondage: from the bondage of physical illness; from the slavery of mental disorder, from the shackles of social stigma or of social arrogance. By His example and His teaching He told us that people with liberated imaginations have very special strengths and those strengths no political system can really destroy for they survive the acts of destruction and go on to create the future. On the other hand he warned us that people without imagination abolish the future in the name of the past, and interpret the Lord of history, that Supreme Artist, as merely the curator of an animated museum and a confectioner of cosmic clichés. You therefore have two important tasks

to perform in the years that are left to this century. First, through the imaginative use of liturgy and worship you have to help tap the reservoir of imagination which is the people you serve. You have to make the Bible come alive and become contemporary so that they can see themselves and their concerns as well as their possibilities within its pages. Through your preaching and teaching you have to convince your people that the world cannot stay as it is; that we cannot go on being divided between the glutted and the gutted; we cannot go on doing a dance of death by way of nuclear stockpile; and we cannot go on doing a dance of delusion by way of media advertisements. You will have to bring home to them that we are all stretched between the apocalyptic and the apocryphal: in other words facing the possibility of radioactive annihilation on the one hand and the annihilation of reality through the idolatry of images. The modern motto is not "I imagine therefore I am" but "I am packaged, therefore I am".

You will have to remind them of two truths that our world has conveniently obscured. The first was uttered by Lord Acton more than a century ago: "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely". The second was uttered by Prime Minister Trudeau about twenty years ago: "the lack of power corrupts and the absolute lack of power corrupts absolutely". Those truths are necessary because the world cannot go on being dominated by two super powers and a small directorate of maxi powers. If we do not have a healthy balance of power between the various sectors of our international system we will have to go on living by the fragile balance of terror. Nor can the world go on tolerating access to its resources by the very few and denial of that access to the very many. I need hardly remind you that poverty begets and

extreme poverty begets extremely; or that population growth declines where security of material means increases leading to an increase of hope. If we ignore these truths we do so at the price of global peril.

Your second task is to remind your congregations of what Jesus told his contemporaries "the Kingdom of heaven is within you" which means that the power of imagination, the power of vision and the power to refashion the world lies within ordinary people who can become quite extraordinary in their impact when their imagination is liberated. You and they will discover that what I have been calling the imagination is a combination of vision and compassion and that what I have been calling power in history is really the capacity to create situations in which people can grow together into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. In short, imagination is love expressed forwards. Grace is the capacity to turn that forward expression into daily living.

A long time ago a celebrated wit, not particularly kind to Anglican clergy described them as follows: "they are invisible during the week and incomprehensible on Sundays". A short time ago another wit, kinder to Anglican clerics, described them as follows: "they are indefatigable during the week and indefensible on Sundays". My knowledge of this College tells me that you, ladies and gentlemen, belong to neither of these categories. If anything you can be described as "invaluable during the week and inviolable on Sundays". But then this college has a reputation for kindling the imagination of its internees and bringing the world and its affairs into the teaching of theology so that this discipline helps them make more sense of their times and gives more power to their elbows to start changing them.

You remember that I began with a somewhat irreverent parody

of the first sentence of the Gospel of St. John. It was not, I hope, an unforgiveable irreverence for I merely meant to call your attention to the revolutionary implications of the original. Whenever the Jews spoke of God the Creator, God the Artist, they saw him as using words to bring worlds into being. Jesus himself the Supreme Artist showed that the creative power is both a human and a Divine power and that through our imaginations we can make mustard seeds move mountains.

That is why I am convinced that the text for the 1980's and 1990's - the period when the imagination must make great changes or mankind will not be there to change anything at all - the text for the remainder of this century must be "in the beginning was the Word".